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**RECREATION**

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C8



# THE GREAT SALT LAKE

*"I love this body of water — its paradoxical nature, the way it will not be tamed."*

— Terry Tempest Williams

Steve Griffin/The Salt Lake Tribune

By Terry Tempest Williams  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

I knew better than to drink from Great Salt Lake, but a swim was more seductive. I shed my clothes, slowly letting the water take me in. My legs stung as the salt licked cuts, scratches made from the dead sage along the beach. I fell forward, rolled on to my back and floated. The lake held me in the palms of its saline hands.

I watched clouds drift, believing that the lake loved me. I floated in and out and my breath coalesced with the breath of waves. These same waves began to hiss and groan. Within seconds, they turned me upside down and hurled me to shore. I lay in the brine, bruised, scraped and scoured. Tasting blood on my parched lips, I pulled myself forward. A whirlwind wrapped my wet body in oolitic sands leaving me clothed in what looked like white, beaded buckskin tight around my skin.

Great Salt Lake is Trickster. Nothing is as it appears. It is wilderness adjacent to a city; a shifting shoreline that plays havoc with highways; islands too stark, too remote to inhabit; water in the desert that no one can drink. It is the liquid lie of the West.

Great Salt Lake strips us of contrivances and conditioning, saying "I am not what you see. Question me. Stand by your own impressions." We are taught not to trust our own experiences. Great Salt Lake teaches us experience is all we have.

I love this body of water — its paradoxical nature, the way it will not be tamed. The State of Utah may try to dike it, divert its waters, build roads across its

## A YEAR WITH THE

### Great Salt Lake

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shores, but, ultimately, it won't matter. Great Salt Lake will survive us. It is a spiritual magnate that lures us home.

Home. Salt water. Desert. There have been those among us who have married themselves to this "inland sea" in spite of its harshness.

The Wenner family was one. From 1886 through 1891, Judge James Wenner and his wife, Kate, made their home on Fremont Island. Judge Wenner was suffering from tuberculosis. The doctors prescribed "a perfect rest from all business cares."

"My heart was beating health, health for him. . . " Mrs. Wenner writes. "I felt like a real frontier woman to begin homesteading our first acres. I loved the sound of it. Relatives and friends were horrified. . . "

The Wenners and their three children lived five consecutive years on Fremont Island, approximately 13 miles in circumference and 20 miles from the mainland. They farmed. They raised sheep and enjoyed "homemade pleasures" and the "quiet life there."

Mrs. Wenner writes, "Time was slipping by so pleasantly that months were slipping into years."

She describes the one time her family left the island for a vacation:

"We were a funny procession going up the street in Ogden, Utah. I, unconscious of my old-fashioned clothes in perfectly good order, somewhat uncomfortable, I admit. The boy with a squeaking pet pelican close to him; the little girl with a box of horned toads; the children would not leave me and they would not leave their pets. Our friends, who were so amused at our appearance then, have now so magnified that little procession until one would think no circus excitement every equaled it."

Judge Wenner died of tuberculosis in 1891 on Fremont Island. While Mrs. Wenner was inside their home making preparations for the funeral, the Wenner children were on the beach collecting stones.

"When all was over they came with these beautiful pebbles of all colors. We each made a letter and spelled the word LOVE on that newly made grave. Then came a shower like sympathy from Heaven and soon a rainbow and the sunshine lit up my world again — the glorious memories of our life and love on that Desert Island."

Love. Passion. A sense of place. Simone Weil writes, "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need for the human soul."

We live alongside Great Salt Lake, one of the most extraordinary natural features in North America. As a community, I do not believe we have honored its rarity. Our lack of intimacy toward this inland sea is not out of neglect, but ignorance. We do not know the nature of this vast body of water that sparkles and sings. If we

■ See C-7, Column 1